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How Pinckney Passed It On

By SEWELL FORD

Say, of all the light runnin', car dodgin', grown up kids that ever waltzed through life on tiptoes— Now who do you guess? Sure, Pinckney! Maybe I've hinted something of the kind about him before; but I ain't ever done the subject justice. It would take four languages and a motion picture outfit to give you even an outline sketch of him; and then, just as you thought you could guess what he'd do next, he'd spring something diff'rent.

Now last week, accordin' to his own schedule, he was supposed to be off on that yachtin' trip got up by Sadie and the Purdy-Pells for the special stunt of unloadin' a punky Austrian Count on the Bar Harbor crowd. But along late Thursday afternoon, when I'm leanin' back in my chair with my feet on the window sill, thinkin' about nothin' in particular and enjoyin' the exercise, a cab fetches up outside. I hears some one prancin' up the stairs two at a jump, and in rushes his joyous nibs, wearin' a Merry Widower straw lid with a pink and white band and carryin' one of his fifty-nine varieties of silver headed sticks.

"Come on, Shorty!" says he. "Get your bag, and let's catch the mountain express! We have forty minutes to make it in."

"Gwan!" says I. "Quit your kiddin' in that breathless way; it's bad for the valves."

"But I mean it; really I do," says he, proddin' me playful in the ribs with the cane handle. "It's all right, I've made all the arrangements, and you can be gone for two or three days just as well as not. Come on, hurry up!"

"Easy now, Pinckney," says I. "This ain't no engine house, where you can stick your head in, holler once, and have me slidin' down the pole. You've rung me in on them nutty excursions of yours times enough."

"But this isn't one of that kind," says he. "Truly, it will be jolly sport, you know, and I had counted on your going with—"

"Say, Pinckney," says I, takin' my heels down and turnin' for a good look at him, "if you'll quit exhaustin' through your cylinders maybe I can hear what you're tryin' to say. It would help some if you'd state where you're goin' and why."

"Oh, didn't I tell you?" says he. "Why, it's somewhere up in the White Mountains."

"No particular spot, I suppose?" says I.

"Don't be absurd!" says he. "I can't remember the name of the station, of course; but it's on the tickets. Isn't that enough?"

"Unless you've lost the tickets," says I. "But how about this detail of why you're goin'? Is that on the tickets too, or do you get the information from the brakeman? Is it just a pleasure trip the doctor has ordered for the benefit of your family, or are you takin' it because you had a funny dream?"

"Purely business," says Pinckney. "It's about—er—" Here he fishes out a card, takes a quick glimpse at it, and goes on, "It's about Notch Manor."

"So-o-o-o?" says I. "And what's this Notch Manor—a three-year-old colt, or a new way of doin' up the hair?"

"It's a hotel," says Pinckney; "quite a large one too, and full of guests. I'm not quite sure, but I'm afraid I own it."

"You're which?" says I. "Afraid you own a hotel? Say, what are the symptoms? If it's catchin', I'd like to be exposed."

"Well, at least, I'm threatened with a hotel," says Pinckney. "Anyway, I must go up and see about it; so I thought I would like to have you—"

"That'll do," says I. "If you'd said that first off we'd be halfway there by now. You with a hotel. Oh, splinters! Why, say, I wouldn't miss that exhibition for a farm! Hi, Swifty! Dig out that emergency travelin' kit of mine, will you? And take care of the shop until I show up again! I'm off with Pinckney!"

And away we starts, just like that. Maybe it was a batty move on my part; but watchin' Pinckney gettin' himself tangled up with diff'rent propositions, and then squirmin' out of 'em, is one of the joys of my existence. Gen'rally he's always been able to duck any damagin' consequences; but from the indications this looks like it might be the date of the eclipse.

"How was it handed to you?" says I, after we'd got aboard the train and was halfway through one of them imitation dinners they serve on the dinin' cars.

Then he goes on to tell about Ollie Bickford and how he got mixed up with him. Seems that Ollie is one of the reg'lar hotel Bickfords, the fam'ly that owns so many resort joints—you know 'em. There was four brothers to start with, and they all contracted the hotel keepin' habit early in life. Each of 'em managed to bring up a fam'ly—not full sized, farm house fam'lies, you understand, but limited editions, that wouldn't occupy too many rooms durin' the rush season—and as fast as a young Bickford grew up tall enough to lean his elbows on the register they built a new hotel for him. They took to it natural, too, as a Greek does to runnin' a fruit stand.

All except Ollie. He'd been spoiled by bein' sent to college and gettin' in with a bunch of young loose-wads. So, when it's time for him to pick out a summer resort and begin harvestin' the vacation money, he ain't prepared. He knows a lot about afternoon teas; but blamed little about any kind of breakfasts except the sort that's brought in on a tray at ten-thirty a. m. His brothers and uncles put him down as the brunette lamb of the flock, and begun speakin' of him as the family joke.

The next thing Ollie knows he's an orphan. He finds that his old man has left him nothing but the Notch Manor house, that's always been a doubtful proposition, with a proviso that if he can run it for two seasons and show a net profit he's to have his share of the dividends from the Bickford system. If he falls down, he's to be put on the disabled pension list, with just enough to keep him out of the soup kitchens.

Well, Ollie starts brave enough. The first season he picks out for manager a college chum of his that played shortstop on the 'varsity nine and sang first bass in the glee club. He had other talents too; but somehow they didn't fit in with the hotel business, and when Ollie counted up at the end of October he was several figures to the bad.

Next he meets Pinckney at the club, tells him his tale of woe, and displays some of the cold, unfeelin' letters his relations have wrote to him. That gets Pinckney int'rested in the case. He offers to put up cash for a new deal and take a mortgage on Notch Manor. So this summer Ollie makes his plunge with an interest handicap and a new manager who'd got his hotel experience actin' as banquet chairman of the Phi Delta Gamma. And once more he slips into the excavation.

Pinckney don't know the full particulars; but he gathers from Ollie's wire that the amateur manager has quit, two of the clerks has followed suit, and he's left with a balance on the wrong side of the ledger and a houseful of disgruntled guests.

"And now he wants to turn over his beastly hotel to me," says Pinckney. "Fancy that!"

"I'm tryin' to," says I; "but it's a strain. What's your program?"

It was a foolish question. Pinckney don't do business accordin' to program. He's just going up to look things over, he says, and to josh Ollie along. I expect if the truth was known, though, Pinckney has an idea he can spend half an hour with Ollie and give him points enough to pull him through. Ever know anybody that didn't think runnin' a hotel would be a cinch for him? I've even had pipe dreams like that myself. But say, neither of us had ever been right up against the proposition before.

And it was a mess, all right. About ten o'clock next mornin' we're landed at a dinky little station up amongst the most perpendicular scenery in the State of New Hampshire, and after a ten minutes' stage ride we're dumped in front of this Notch Manor house, squattin' down between two counties set up on edge.

It's a big four-story barracks that's sufferin' from a scarletina roof and an epidemic of striped window awnings. Besides the carriage drives, there's just enough flat ground left for a postage stamp lawn and a couple of tennis courts on the side. You couldn't walk two blocks in any direction without comin' to a place where there ought to be a passenger elevator but wa'n't so much as a ladder.

"Gee!" says I. "Talk about spendin' the summer in the mountains! Me for the bottom of a nice cool air shaft!"

"But look at the scenery," says Pinckney.

"That'd give me a crick in the neck," says I.

"This air is certainly exhilarating, though," says he, swellin' out his chest.

"It's good enough air," says I; "but I'm callin' for something more from life than just a chance to breathe. When can we jump a train back to Broadway?"

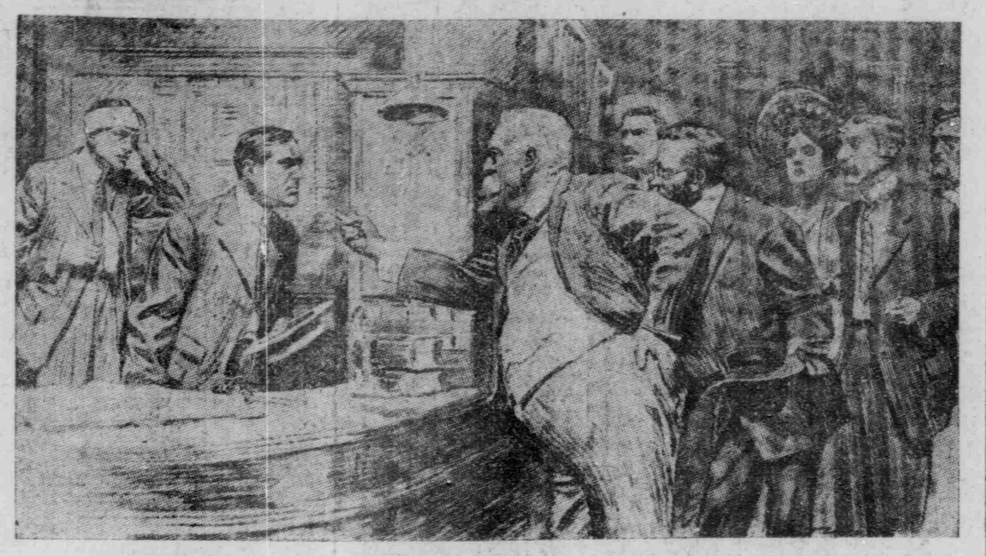
Pinckney says there's a through express stops about six p. m., and he hopes to have everything all straightened out by then; so we climbs out of the stage and tells a porter to take us in to Mr. Bickford.

"He's very busy just now, sir," says the porter.

"So much the better," says Pinckney. "Ah, there he is!"

And we admits that the baggage juggler was an accurate describer. Over the heads of the crowd around the office desk I gets a glimpse of a light haired, good lookin' young chap who's tryin' to mop the worried expression off his face with a handkerchief and answer seven different people at once. It's a reg'lar anvil chorus he's conductin'; for they're every last one of 'em knocking something or other. One's complainin' about the table service, others about the grub, and the rest wants to know why their laundry don't come, where the cigar clerk's gone to, and why they can't get hot water on the top floor. Ollie was doin' his best to pass out the soothin' syrup, when he looks up and sees Pinckney driftin' in behind the counter.

"Thank goodness you've come!" says he, turnin' his back on the crowd.



"Ah, go sit on a tack!" says I. "And if you don't explode, you're puncture proof."

"Here, let's go into the private office and lock the door. Oh, you have some one with you."

"Only Shorty McCabe," says Pinckney, doin' the honors.

"Do you know how to run a hotel?" says Ollie, turnin' to me eager and expectant.

"He can run anything," says Pinckney.

"Gwan!" says I. "Don't you let him pump you full of hot air that way."

But Ollie's too much excited to take advice. His one idea is that Pinckney's come to take the hotel off his hands.

"It's yours from this minute!" says he. "I don't care a hang about the will or anything else! I want to get out of this before I go crazy. Oh, it's been awful!"

With that Ollie slumps into a chair, and it's only by degrees that Pinckney gets out of him an itemized bill of the horrible state of affairs. It don't look so wonderful bad, as far as we can see. The late banquet artist did work up something of a deficit before he left, owing to slim attendance early in the season; but since then the place has filled up, and the books show a good fat margin of weekly receipts over expenses.

"Yes; but if they all leave!" groans Ollie. "And they will! They've threatened to do it. Didn't you hear them just now? It's been like that every day."

"Pshaw!" says Pinckney. "You don't know how to handle them. Don't try to explain; just make promises. Promise them anything. That's all they want."

"But things are bad," says Ollie. "The meat cook is careless, the hallboys lazy and the waiters impudent. I've talked to them about it too, and asked them if they wouldn't please do better; but, do you know, they only laugh at me."

"The mean things!" says I.

Pinckney shakes his head at me, and proceeds to pass out some more valuable advice. He tells Ollie the way to reform the help and get 'em up on their toes is to give 'em the grand jolly. His idea is to throw each one a bouquet about twice a day, tell 'em how good they are and what bully work they're doing.

"That's the way I manage my man when he's cranky," says Pinckney. "Come on, we'll try it now."

"I—I'd rather not," says Ollie.

But Pinckney is all worked up over the notion, and he fairly drags Ollie along to make the rounds of the building on his softsoap mission. As for me, I stays behind and studies the time table.

I don't know how thick Pinckney spread it on; but he must have done a wholesale job, for they've hardly got back before the results begin to show. Inside of half an hour two dozen assorted help has come in and struck Ollie for a raise. If they were such crackerjacks as they'd been told they were, they wanted more money, or else they meant to quit. Some of 'em went so far as to knock off pendin' arbitration. By lunch time the thing has spread until it's developed into a general strike.

And maybe there wa'n't a mad crowd of hungry folks in the dinin' room that noon, with three grub slingers tryin' to serve four hundred people, and only cold dishes at that! Wow! I could hear 'em way out in the far corner of the veranda, where I'm gettin' away with a couple of ham sandwiches I'd bribed a bellhop to swipe from the kitchen. A little later you should have seen the bunch swarmin' around the office desk, and heard 'em tellin' Pinckney and Ollie their private opinion of such a hotel.

I slips around where I could peek through the window at 'em, and when I catches Pinckney's eyes I gives him the grin. I could afford to. Wa'n't there that six o'clock train back to New York? And wouldn't I have something to rub into Pinckney? Say, it was all to the joyous—while it lasted. I goes out for a little climb up one of them shady stepladder paths, just to kill time and think over what a lovely mess he was in. I felt so good I sits on a rock for about an hour and gloats.

Allowin' plenty of time to make the train, I strolls back to the hotel, and finds the guests holdin' indignation meetin's all over the front veranda. I grins once more and pushes in to look up Pinckney. He ain't behind the desk or anywhere in sight. In the private office there's nobody but Ollie, face down on a leather couch, with a wet towel around his head.

"Where's your side partner, the softsoap apostle?" says I.

"Do you mean Pinckney?" says he. "Why, he's gone."

"Ha, ha! Ho, ho!" says I. "So he took to the woods, eh?"

"No," says Ollie. "He caught the local down to the junction, and is going to get the express there. He said he had left you in full charge."

"What's that?" says I. "Left who?"

"You," says Ollie.

"Me!" says I. "Not on your silhouette!"

"But there's no one else," says he, proppin' himself up and spreadin' out his hands. "I'm out of it. You'll find a note from Pinckney on the desk."

It's there, all right, and it's a cute one, too. He explains what a hole Ollie is in, and how he'd love to stay and pull him out if it wa'n't for his havin' to join Count Puggledorf in Portland; and won't I take hold and do the best I can until he can send up an experienced manager? He don't care what I do, or what happens, if I'll only stay.

"Ah, scissors!" says I. "You wait until I see him on the express! Where's that bag of mine?"

"Oh, don't, please don't leave me here alone!" says Ollie. "He said you'd take charge, and I've told everyone you would too. Please, Mr. McCabe, don't go away!"

"Sorry I can't oblige," says I; "but this is where I duck. So long, Ollie. Good luck," and I makes a dash through the door.

Just as I was grabbin' my bag from under the counter, the first delegation from the hot collar convention hits the other side. The chairman seems to be a bull necked, ruby complected party, with a waist on him like a sugar barrel and a voice that's as soft and soothin' as the honk of an automobile horn.

"Hey!" says he, shovin' a fat forefinger under my nose. "Are you the new manager of this rotten establishment?"

It wa'n't so much what he said, as how he shot it off, that ruffles my back feathers. "Ah, go sit on a tack!" says I. "And if you don't explode you're puncture proof."

"Wh-wh-what's that?" says he, turnin' purple.

"That's Ninth avenue repartee," says I. "I don't make a practice of usin' it, but when fat parties like you go to doin' the human doormat act with me, I sometimes indulge. Now I'd advise you to go off somewhere in the shade and cool down."

"Will you answer my question, sir?" he bellows. "Are you, or are you not the manager of this—"

And say, it come to me all of a sudden. I didn't want to be, but at that minute I was. "Well," says I, chucklin' my hat on the safe and leanin' across with my elbows on the counter, "what then? I'm the new manager. Who the blazes are you?"

That unexpected come back almost chokes him; but he splutters out that he's Senator Somebody or Other, and that him and his two daughters are occupyin' suite B on the second floor, at the rate of fifty dollars a day.

"Beginnin' tomorrow noon," says I, "it'll be sixty per."

"Wh-a-at!" he gasps.

"S-i-x six, t-y ty, sixty per," says I, countin' it off for him on my fingers.

"We—we'll leave!" he shouts.

"Good!" says I. "I need your rooms for the Count. One side, please. Any of you other gents got remarks to make?"

A fussy little man wearin' gold spectacles steps up and begins to squeak out that the coffee was vile, that his wife couldn't get the maids to answer the bell, and that all they'd been served for luncheon was cold ham.

"That's nothin'," says I. "There's worse to come. When you've had enough, clear out; but if you bring me any more kicks I'll take you up to the roof and drop you off! Next!" and with that I shucks my coat, rolls up my sleeves, and prepares to send back whatever I'm about to receive.

It don't come, though. That bunch of disgruntled grouches that's been making life miserable for the meek and lowly Ollie for the last few weeks just catches their breath, stares at one another foolish, and then does the vanishing act. I turns around, to find Ollie standin' at my elbow with his eyes popped out and the towel over one ear.

"Thank you!" says he, grabbin' my hand. "Oh, thank you, thank you! That was bully, bully!"

"It's only a curtain raiser to what's comin' next," says I. "Long's I'm started on this thing, I might's well push it through. Go collect all the help in the dinin' room. I'm goin' to make a speech to 'em."

And say, you never know what you can do until you get going, do you? The way that stuffed party had riled me, and the thoughts of how that gang of grub hustlers had got puffed up over a little hot air, just put me in fine condition for short arm oratin'. I begins by tellin' 'em what a bunch of no good, butter fingered tip chasers they was, and ends by announcin' that every last one of 'em is fired on the spot. Then I tacks on a postscript that if any of 'em is willin' to hustle the way they should, they can have ten minutes to prove it by gettin' busy. It's either walk or work.

What I looks for is a procession towards the station, but instead of that some one starts givin' three cheers for the new manager, and before half the time limit is up the whole mob is jugglin' crockery, and shakin' sheets, and gettin' dinner, as merry as a picnic party.

Ollie forgets the headache and comes back to life. "But what did you mean," says he, "when you told the Senator about wanting his rooms for some Count?"

"Nothing but a bluff," says I. "I was thinking of Puggledorf. But say, Ollie, wouldn't it be a good thing for business if he was comin' here?"

"Would it!" says Ollie. "Why, with Count Puggledorf in the house you couldn't drive them away with a club!"

"Then the Count comes," says I. "Pinckney's got to make that bluff good, or we'll sue him for breach of promise."

That's what I wired him too, and he sends back word that he'll ship Puggledorf up on the next train. The minute Ollie spreads the news that a real live Count is on his way to Notch Manor, fifty women stops packin' their trunks, and the Senator re-engages his suite for three weeks more, payin' in advance.

And you never see anyone recover his nerve the way Ollie does. He don't take any back talk from anyone, but keeps the help on the jump, and tells me he's going to finish the season ahead of the game.

I didn't stay long enough to see which one of that giddy female crowd got the strangle hold on Puggledorf, but I saw enough to dope this out: That the way to run a mountain hotel is to choke off the kickers, throw a scare into the help, and have a spare Count up your sleeve in case of emergency.

His Little Red Hen

By MARION HILL, Author of "The Mol-Gobbin," etc.

It presupposes a decided amount of lovableness—a nickname does—and people who never achieve the indignity are generally so cramful of good points that they never have room for the one necessary point more—charm.

She was a dear little thing—that small Henrie—about the nicest child that a traveling theatrical company could ever carry around with it and not grow annoyed with; because youngsters in a troupe are generally no end of a nuisance, being "neither man nor woman, neither ghost nor human," as Poe puts it, of the bells, but "ghouls.' Henrie was far indeed from being a ghoul, though, to tell the truth, she was as uncanny a baby as ever kept grown people guessing; and it was easy enough, from the look of her, to tell why her father always called her his little red hen, for she was copper-colored as a cranberry. This comprehensive description has a discouragingly ugly sound, and it fits to a T; nevertheless Henrie was as pretty as a bronze elf, with hair exactly the color of a new one-cent piece, and eyes and brows and lashes to match. Her father, Jack Germaine, was pleased as peacocks about this coloring, and used to dress her in bronze velvet, with fixings in keeping—shoes, gloves and ribbons all of the same hue—so that she was a red-brown shine from top to toe, like a sprout of young oak in springtime.

She never said smart things. We couldn't have stood that. But she said awfully shrewd ones, or, at least, a shrewd thought showed back of the simple words, as once when she asked her father:

"Jack, why didn't you name me Geneva, after my mother?" The tragedy of the business, all uncomprehended though it was, cast a shadow over the brilliance of her glinting eyes—those red-brown eyes throw lights like sparks.

Now, naturally it was in Jack Germaine's mind that he would rather see his baby daughter dead than named after his untamable waif of a wife, but, of course, he could not voice such a sentiment, so quoth cheerfully:

"What's the matter with being named after an Aunt Henrietta?"

As a good many of us were standing around within earshot Jack Germaine put extra heartiness into his bluff, and the child shrank sensitively. She brooded to herself for quite a while and then dropped asleep in a frightening fashion that she had—frightening for the reason that she always looked as if she had died—great brown circles underneath her red lashes and an odd pallor on her tiny face.

We all knew that there was a quirk wrong with her heart action, it was too fast or too slow or too something; at any rate, its abnormal behavior was the reason why Henrie traveled around with her father instead of remaining with the Aunt Henrietta in question. The doctor said the child worried too much when separated from both father and mother and had better be with one of them. It would be a clever doctor who could induce Geneva Germaine to saddle her artistic career with the care of a baby, so the charge fell to Jack. Of course, Jack and Geneva were in different companies. Theatrical agencies and managers always carefully see to it that husbands and wives do not travel together. Even if they had not in this case, Geneva would Geneva Germaine needed plenty of room, and got it. All that Jack needed was a home, and didn't get it. That such people should marry each other is quite inevitable.

It is a wonder Jack Germaine did not go all to pieces during a season, for in addition to an arduous part and the duties which fell to him as acting manager, the care that he put upon his delicate baby was exhausting in itself. It is a popular witticism that a man can't take care of a child, whereas the fact is that a man outwomans a woman in tenderness and intelligent skill when the fates ordain that he shall play mother as well as father. Henrie wouldn't have lasted five minutes if left to the gentle mothering of Geneva. Geneva looked the part all right, though—had eyes as velvety as purple pansies and a soft beauty of face that would have knocked spots out of Niobe for devotional affection.

Though Jack held out during a season, Henrie never did, drooping from day to day till it was always a race for life to get her into the country in the summer. What she wanted was a woman's companionship. We had two lovely girls with us, Essie Airly and Helen Keith, and Henrie loved Essie, but wouldn't tolerate Helen, which was a pity, for Helen was the mothering kind, while Essie, though sweet and winsome, was as unmaternal as a chicken—you know how a hen can stand on a chick, which squawks its life away underfoot, while the hen looks kind of heartwrung and miserable, but hasn't the sense to step off the victim. Well, that was Essie. She could play with a child, work for it, feed it, metaphorically scratch for it and present it with juicy bits, but she couldn't mother, couldn't coo and cuddle and croon and cure aches with a kiss, in mystic mother fashion.

As for Helen—well, Helen and Jack loved each other, and Henrie divined it and resented it for Geneva's sake—and there's the thing in a nutshell.

Really, we haven't any private life. When we are not before the footlights performing to an audience we are in a Pullman car or a hotel lobby performing, though unwillingly and often unwittingly, for the delight and diversion of a public which doesn't have to pay for the privilege. Our letters are handed out to us by the hotel clerk or the stage doorkeeper, or, rather those worthies allow us to root among them, and we all know the others' business. If a man loves his wife and she doesn't write to him, we know it; if he isn't overkeen about correspondence and she is, we know that, too. And if the writer is another man's wife, or another woman's husband, why, we're apt to hop onto a combination of that sort quick as streaks.

And the things we hear! We are all idiots together in the matter of talking too much. We shut a door of a room, fancy ourselves hermetically entombed and proceed to exchange anguish or goo-goo, utterly regardless of open transoms. We have the courtesy to pretend, however, that what is not addressed to us direct has not been overheard.

We none of us confided to another that Essie Airly was patiently in love with Fenton Lessing, that Lessing was in love with Helen, and that Helen was in love with Jack Germaine and he with her, both breaking their hearts trying to keep faith with themselves and with Geneva, who never by any chance kept faith with anybody.

The procession of events was exactly in line with the ancient fairy tale, "Water won't quench fire, fire won't burn stick, stick won't hit dog, dog won't bite pig, pig won't go over the stile and we'll never get home tonight."

The nursery tale version of it was Chapman Childs'. He was the low comedian. He had to be. He wanted to be a tragedian, and spiritually was capable of it, having a scholar's mind and the silver voice of an orator, but the breath of his life happened to be confined in a very comic body. He had a paunch which belied him, for he rarely ate one full meal a week, having a screw loose with his digestion; also, he had legs a trifle bowed, and his face was fat and heavy; his eyebrows, too, had a grotesque tilt. His general make-up was low comedy, and that settled it. If he tried to be manly and serious the public let him starve. Under such circumstances one ordinarily makes up one's mind to be funny. Usually, too, more brains go to a first-class fool than to a dozen leading men.

If Jack Germaine played mother to Henrie, why Chapman Childs was grandmother, and a good one, too. Toward the end of the season, he had worked himself and the rest of us into nervous jimjams concerning the baby's evident loss of health. By the time we had reached—what was the town now? Can't remember the name, but know it was out west somewhere, for we had to play Sunday night—wherever it was, Henrie wilted suddenly, like a little brown nasturtium.

"Don't drag her around to the theater tonight, Jack," ordered Chapman agrily, mad as hops because his feelings were strained. "Tuck her in bed and leave her to sleep. We'll all come and have supper with you, Henrie."

"All right," said Henrie, weakly.

"All right," said Jack just as weakly.

It sounded like a sensible arrangement, but we had grown so used to seeing the tiny lady at the wings that that night's performance went like a funeral, though the audience screamed as usual, and we were all mighty glad to get through and hurry back to the hotel.

"How's my Little Red Hen?" called Jack, while yet away down the corridor. He did not stop to think it was the middle of the night and that certain weirdly constructed folk might be wanting to sleep. To him, and to us, the middle of the night was ever the likeliest part of the day.

"Oo-hoo!" she piped up, invisible. The sound was good to hear. One is apt to fancy always that a child left alone will go and swallow something, or will fall off, or fall out, or will croak somehow. A child is awfully like strong drink—once get used to it and you can't be comfortable with it or without it.

We all burst cheerfully in. Except for Fenton Lessing. He was never cheerful; he was too young and happy to be cheerful. And besides he was carrying an armful of bottles. Essie had a tray of sandwiches.

"I've read it," said Jack, gamely.

Henrie was completely snowed under with Geneva's pictures, the bed was covered with them.

"I think this is the prettiest of all," she said, cramming one into her father's hand. "Don't you, Jack?"

"Very pretty," he assented. It was tough on Jack. His wife's face smiled up at him, as impudent as life.

"Is her season a long one?" pursued Henrie.

"I don't know," said Jack.

"Will she sign for a summer engagement, do you think?"

"I cannot possibly tell, Henrie."

"Doesn't she write to you ever?"

"No, Henrie."

"Why, do you suppose?"

"She never was any hand at writing letters," he said. Then, under his breath, "to me."

"If she doesn't sign for the summer will she come to see us?"

If ever a man looked as if it would be a relief to lie, it was Jack. His little daughter stared at him hopefully. But, between these two, whose brief home happiness had been fabricked on lies and wrecked by them, there was a solemn pact of truth, truth to be taken by the handle if possible; if not, then by the blade, as now—

"No."

"Why?" whispered Henrie.

"We're too slow for Geneva," said Jack, forcing a rollicking tone and rejoicing to see that he was able to keep back the deathly pallor which had begun creeping into Henrie's face. "She likes good times and good company. She'll probably go abroad, as she always does."

"Geneva's popular, isn't she?" crowed Henrie, her pride returning.

"She is," said Jack dryly.

"Get your toes out of the way, Hen; I want to put down the tray," ordered Essie, glad of a pretense which enabled her to bundle the photographs away to a side table.

"How did the play go tonight, Jack?" asked Henrie.

"Great!"

"What sort of a house?"

"Stuffed!"

"Did they laugh at your funny scene in the last act?"

"Fell off the benches!"

"Oo-oo!" Henrie rubbed her soft hands in a shuddering delight. She felt a proprietary interest in that scene—Jack always used to play it "to" her, nights. "Don't leave me again," she begged suddenly.

"I won't," promised Jack, "for I see you do not sleep."

"No," murmured Henrie, "I think."

"What about?" challenged Childs, taking the evening paper from his pocket.

Henrie made no answer; her eyes were fixed darkly on Helen Keith, to whose side Jack had gone.

"Any time tonight, Germaine," suggested Lessing, glowering over the tops of the bottles. Jack relieved him, none too genially. There was open hostility between the two.

"By Jove!" snorted Childs, throwing a startled look from the newspaper to Jack. Then he nervously rolled up the sheet and stuffed it in his pocket.

"I've read it," said Jack gamely. He cast a protective glance at Henrie. "But be careful you don't—"

"God bless my soul, never!" threw in Child.

"—let the little shaver into the joke," finished Jack stoically.

Geneva played the same town the following week. It was no unusual coincidence, this matrimonial game of hare and hounds; couples can dodge each other in and out of cities the season through, without once meeting, even at a depot; but, to stir advance interest, and in a way best calculated to catch the public's winking eye, the papers were stocked with anecdotes of such of Geneva's amusements as were printable. To Geneva herself it added the final pleasure to her escapades that she committed them under her husband's name. This last of hers was certainly very funny—to any one else's husband, that is.

"Were we long coming?" asked Helen, bending lovingly over Henrie.

"No," said the child curtly, turning away.

Monday night in a new town," explained Essie Airly. "You know what that means, Henrie. We'll be through half an hour earlier tomorrow."

"Get a cork out, Jack. I'm chewing feathers," mourned Childs.

Supper was soon in progress. It was a failure as far as Henrie was concerned, she eating nothing and soon dropping to sleep. It was a fashion she had, to sleep when we were all around her and to stay awake when she was left to sleep.

Instituted for Henrie, the meal was

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